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ABSTRACT

This study investigated differences between communication norms in English and Japanese in a unique situation in which the speech acts of "asking for permission" and "requesting" merge. Focus was on the pair-verbs "borrow" and "lend." Subjects were 26 native speakers of English, mostly teachers, and 64 native speakers of Japanese, all university students learning English. Data were gathered using a discourse completion questionnaire consisting of scripted dialogues, analyzed for: (1) social distance between speaker and addressee (siblings, friends, teachers) and (2) the degree of imposition on the addressees (low, medium, high). Results indicate that most native speakers of English preferred asking for permission in most contexts, while the non-native speakers used requesting more often. Explicit instruction in native-like strategies in this context, including use of mitigation devices when appropriate, is recommended. Contains 15 references. (MSE)

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ASKING FOR PERMISSION VS. MAKING REQUESTS: STRATEGIES CHOSEN BY JAPANESE SPEAKERS OF ENGLISH

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the differences between communication norms in English and Japanese in a unique situation in which the speech acts of 'asking for permission' and 'requesting' merge, focusing on the pair-verbs 'borrow' and 'lend.' Data collected by means of a discourse completion questionnaire, consisting of scripted dialogues, are analyzed according to (1) the social distance between the speakers and the addressees (siblings, friends, and teachers), and (2) the degree of imposition on the addressees (low, medium, and high). The finding was that when alternatives, the 'asking for permission' strategy or the 'requesting' strategy, were available to speakers, the majority of native speakers preferred the 'asking for permission' strategy consistently in most of the contexts, while the preferences of Japanese students varied, with the 'requesting' strategy outnumbering the 'asking for permission' strategy. Pedagogical implications of these findings are discussed; and it is suggested that students acquire communicative rules in the target language.

INTRODUCTION

It is generally accepted that norms of communication differ from language to language, and from culture to culture, and that in order to become more competent at speaking a second language, students have to acquire not only syntactic rules but also pragmatic ones. The Japanese language is well known for its highly developed system of honorifics. Students studying English, however, tend to assume that there is no need to worry about politeness norms in English because syntactic or lexical markers to express politeness are rarely mentioned in English textbooks. This assumption overlooks the fact that English has its own norms of politeness which are pragmatically present.

To be polite in English, speakers give addressees a choice, especially if the interaction is not to benefit the addressees. Therefore, one rule of politeness in English is not to impose,

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representing negative politeness strategies to satisfy the addressees' desire to be respected (not to be imposed upon) (Brown & Levinson, 1978). In Japanese, on the other hand, it is more polite for speakers to clarify the benefits they get by verbalising that they are indebted to the addressees. (Koizumi, 1990)

One example that reveals the difference of this communication norm in English and Japanese is the variety of means used to ask for permission and make requests. They are both face-threatening speech acts: asking for permission is risky for the speaker in losing his/her face, and making requests imposes mainly upon the addressee. (Brown & Levinson, 1978) These two speech acts, which our study focused on, merge when a pair-verb 'borrow' and 'lend' is involved. If the speaker wants to use a pen which belongs to the person spoken to, two means of expressions are possible: "Can I /Could I borrow your pen?" and "Can you/ Could you lend me your pen?" The former is the 'asking for permission' strategy and the latter the 'requesting' strategy.

Theoretically, we can choose either expression to achieve the same goal. But if choosing between one of them is consistently preferred by a language norm and the other by another language norm, this is then an implication that there is a communicative 'rule' in the language that determines the choice. In our previous studies we investigated how native speakers of English, Japanese students studying English and native speakers of Japanese differ in utilizing different strategies to achieve the same goal. We found that in English there is a tendency to use the 'asking for permission' form (Can I borrow...?), while in Japanese the 'making requests' form, as in 'kashite-(lend),' is used more frequently. However, the scope of our research was limited to interactions between the speaker and his/her family members. (Tajika & Niki, 1991; Niki, 1993)

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In the present study, we again focused on the differences between communication norms in English and Japanese in terms of 'asking for permission'(borrowing) and 'requesting'(lending). Bearing the following questions in mind, we presented each group with situations in which the speaker seeks a favor from the addressee; that is, to borrow an item which belongs to the addressee.

1. Which strategies do native speakers and Japanese students prefer to use to achieve the same goal, 'asking for permission' or 'requesting'?
2. Do native speakers and Japanese students change their strategies (for borrowing and lending), depending on the social distance between the speaker and the addressee and the degree of imposition on the addressee? If so, what are the differences and how can they be explained?
3. How can teachers help Japanese students become better communicators in English?

We hoped that by answering these questions we would begin to realize the differences between the communication norms in English and Japanese.

METHOD

Procedures

For our study we prepared a discourse completion questionnaire, consisting of scripted dialogues. Ideally, data should reflect an 'authentic' picture of the spoken language. In our case, the collection of data under field conditions was almost impossible, so we had to use the written elicitation techniques. Rintell and Mitchell, who studied both role play techniques and elicitation techniques, found that "Both role play and discourse completion tests elicit representations of spoken language; informants say, or write, what they or someone else might say in a given situation." (pp. 270-271)

Our dialogues included interactions in which we varied (1) the social distance between the speakers and the addressees and (2) the degree of imposition on the addressees. For the social distance we chose siblings, friends, and teachers. For the degree of imposition we chose items such as pencils, ballpoint pens and erasers used in low imposition cases; umbrellas for medium imposition; and necklaces and cameras for high imposition. Three dialogues were prepared for each relationship in view of 3 degrees of imposition (low, medium, and high); thereby, the total number of the dialogues used was 9.

The requested items and the social distance between the speakers and the addressees were specified, and the pair-verb 'borrow/lend' sentences were left out as blank lines. This was done so that the informants could fill in the missing blanks with the expressions they felt would be most appropriate. The following is a sample of one of the dialogues used:

(umbrella) (borrow/lend)
A: you B: your friend
A: Oh, no! It's 5:00. I've got to go now.
B: It's raining. Hurry home, Lisa (Ted).
A:

B: Sure. Here you are.
A: Thank you.
B: You're welcome.

By using this procedure, emphasis could be placed on the 'appropriateness of the context.' Because our study was aimed at getting a natural intuitive reaction from the participants without calling for metalinguistic judgements, the questionnaire was written in a way that would avoid raising the participants' consciousness regarding the politeness standard.

When this questionnaire was given, the 9 contexts in question were dispersed among 24 other contexts having different illocutionary acts and different verbs. This was done to avoid easy guesses by the participants about the intention of the questionnaire.

Subjects

The target group consisted of 26 native speakers of English and 64 Japanese university

students. Among the 26 native speakers, half were males and the other half females, ranging from 21 to 38 in age (M=27). There were two Canadians, and the others were from the United States. Due to the limited number of native speakers available, those who volunteered were mostly English teachers. Their average stay in Japan was rather short, 1 year and 10 months.

The 64 Japanese university students were given the same questionnaire on the first day of their junior year. They consisted of English majors, most of whom are enrolled in the course of English education, which means that they are hoping to be teachers of English after graduation. We assumed that they are at an intermediate level; i.e., they have at least acquired syntactic rules of English, though it is doubtful whether they have mastered pragmatic competency yet.

Among the 64 students, 59 were females and only 5 were males. Japanese students studying English tend to assume that there is no need to worry about gender differences in English, because syntactic or lexical markers to express gender are rarely mentioned in English textbooks. Therefore, for the present study we did not investigate the gender variable.

ANALYSIS

Quantitative data

The participants used a variety of expressions as the linguistic form of the head acts. These ranged from direct to conventionally indirect such as preparatory (interrogative forms like "Can I/ Could you...?"), or want statements ("I'd like to ...."), and so forth. Here we should mention that our concern is not to know which is more polite, "Can I borrow a pen?" or "Can you lend me a pen?" The scale of politeness of the expressions given by the participants is beyond the scope of this study.

Blum-Kulka et al. (p.19) contend that "Choice of perspective presents an important source of variation in requests." They distinguished requests by the following: according to the speaker's perspective (speaker-oriented: "Can I ...?"), the addressee's perspective (hearer-oriented: "Can you ...?", the inclusive perspective ("Can we ...?"), and the impersonal perspective ("It needs to be ..."). In this study we are primarily concerned with distinguishing head acts according to whether they emphasize the role of the speaker or that of the addressee. Therefore, we classified the head acts into two strategy types: 'asking for permission' and 'requesting.' Consequently imperatives and preparatory questions ("Can you ... ?") are both in the same category in our data, the 'requesting' strategy. In addition, we had the 'want statement' strategy for our analysis, because in our previous studies Japanese students had used the "I want.../I'd like to borrow ...." form rather frequently.

Table 1 shows a typical example of the expressions obtained from the native speakers and the Japanese students. The focus is on the social distance between the speakers and the addressees: their siblings (status, intimate), friends (status, equal), and teachers (status, different: a significant social distance). To borrow an umbrella (the medium degree of imposition) from respective addressees, which expressions in which strategies do native speakers and Japanese students prefer to use? The choice of native speakers is shown on the left side of the table. Most of them (85% to siblings, 92% to friends and 100% to teachers) chose the 'asking for permission' strategy.

Table 1. DISTRIBUTION OF SOCIAL DISTANCE
Degree of Imposition : medium (umbrella)

Relationship		Groups: Natives speakers (26) siblings	friends	teachers	Japansese Students (64) siblings	friends	teachers
Asking for permission	can I	13	12	1	13	17	10
	could I	6	12	10		2	2
	may I			4	7	16	12
	might I						1
	mind (I)	1		1	1		
	wonder (I)						
	would it be ADJ (I)			4			
	do you think (I)			4			
	do you have (I)	1					
	is it OK? (I)						
	let me borrow	1					
	would you let me borrow			1			
Subtotals in % (raw scores)		85 (22)	92(24)	100(25)	33(21)	57(35)	41(25)
Requesting	lend		1		3	1	
	please lend				9	8	
	do you						
	can you				9	4	1
	could you	3			5	3	8
	will you				10	7	4
	would you		1		4	2	21
	mind (you)	1					2
	would it be ADJ (you)						
	do you think (you)						
	do you have (you)				1		
	is it OK? (you)						
Subtotals in % (raw scores)		15 (4)	8 (2)	0	6* (41)	40 (25)	59 (36)
Want statement	I want to				2	1	
	I would like to					1	
	I would like you to						
	I'll be happy ...if...						
Subtotals in % (raw scores)		0	0	0	3 (2)	3 (2)	0
Totals		26	26	25	64	62	61
Others				1		2	3

* Do you want to borrow an umbrella?
wrong answers (Will you use...?/May you lend me ...?/Shall I borrow ...?)

The lower column of Table 1 shows that very few native speakers chose the 'requesting' strategy. Interestingly, there was one native speaker, a female, who used the imperative form, "Lend me an umbrella," when speaking to her friend. But right after this utterance, she added, "Is it alright?" - a mitigating device when asking for permission. One possible explanation for her hybrid expression may be that she has been studying in Japan (one year and two months) and as a result used the 'requesting' strategy. However, in view of the fact that she chose the 'asking for permission' strategy in the other dialogues, we contend that she used the imperative form in this case simply because the conversation was a casual one.

The Japanese students, on the other hand, depended heavily on the 'requesting' strategy as shown in the middle column on the right side. For instance, when they wanted to borrow an umbrella from their friends, 1 student used a straight-forward imperative, "Lend me an umbrella," while 8 students used "Please lend me an umbrella." It seems that the students assumed that the use of 'please' would make the request sound polite.

When they wanted to borrow an umbrella from their teachers, 8 students used "Could you ...?" 4 used "Will you ...?" and 21 (about a third of the students) used "Would you ...?", while no native speaker used any 'requesting' strategy when addressing his/her teacher.

Table 2 shows a typical example based on the degree of imposition on the addressees (teachers, in this case). Which expressions did they prefer to use to borrow a pencil? (low

Table 2. DISTRIBUTION OF EXPRESSIONS: DEGREE OF IMPOSITION
Addressees: teachers

		Groups: Natives speakers (26)			Japansese Students (64)		
Relationship		siblings	friends	teachers	siblings	friends	teachers
Asking for permission	can I	3	1	1	11	10	7
	could I	9	10	9	3	2	3
	may I	6	4	1	8	12	2
	might I				1	1	1
	mind (I)		1				1
	wonder (I)						
	would it be ADJ (I)			1			
	do you think (I)		4	3			
	do you have (I)		4	4			
	is it OK? (I)	2		1			
	let me borrow						
	would you let me borrow		1				
Subtotals in % (raw scores)		77 (20)	100 (25)	80 (20)	38 (23)	41 (25)	23 (14)
Requesting	lend				5		1
	please lend						
	do you						
	can you				1	1	
	could you	4		1	8	8	8
	will you				4	4	7
	would you	2			18	21	26
	mind (you)			1	1	2	2
	would it be ADJ (you)						
	do you think (you)			2			
	do you have (you)			1			
	is it OK? (you)						
Subtotals in % (raw scores)		23 (6)	0 (0)	20 (5)	61 (37)	59 (36)	71 (44)
Want statement	I want to						
	I would like to				1		4
	I would like you to						
	I'll be happy ...if...						
Subtotals in % (raw scores)		0	0	0	2 (1)		7 (4)
Totals		26	25	25	61	61	62
Others*			1	1	3	3	2

Do you want to borrow an umbrella?/Would you like toborrow mine?
wrong answers

degree of imposition); an umbrella? (medium); and a camera? (high). Again, there is the same tendency. As opposed to the native speakers' preference for the 'asking for permission' strat-

Table 3. PREFERRED STRATEGIES
Social Distance between Speakers and Addressees

		Siblings			Friends			Teachers		
*	**	Low	Med	High	Low	Med	High	Low	Med	High
N.	P	75	85	88.5	84	92	88	77	100	80
	R	25	15	11.5	16	8	12	23	0	20
	S	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
J.	P	37	33	25	44	57	32	38	41	23
	R	63	64	64	56	40	65	51	59	71
	S	0	3	11	0	3	3	2	0	6

*N = Native Speaker
J = Japanese Student
**P = Asking for Permissions
R = Requesting
S = Want Statement

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Table 4. PREFERRED STRATEGIES
Degree of Imposition on Addressees

		Siblings			Friends			Teachers		
*	**	Low	Med	High	Low	Med	High	Low	Med	High
N.	P	75	84	77	85	92	100	88.5	88	80
	R	25	16	23	15	8	0	11.5	12	20
	S	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
J.	P	37	44	38	33	57	41	25	32	23
	R	63	56	61	64	40	59	64	65	71
	S	0	0	2	3	3	0	11	3	7

*N = Native Speaker
J = Japanese Student
**P = Asking for Permissions
R = Requesting
S = Want Statement

egy, more than half of the Japanese students preferred the 'requesting' strategy. The middle column on the right side shows the expressions of the Japanese students. When they wanted to borrow a camera from their teachers (high degree of imposition), 71% of the students chose the 'requesting' strategy.

Table 3 and Table 4 show an overview as to how the participants chose their expressions depending on the social distance and the degree of imposition.

Figure 1. Social Distance

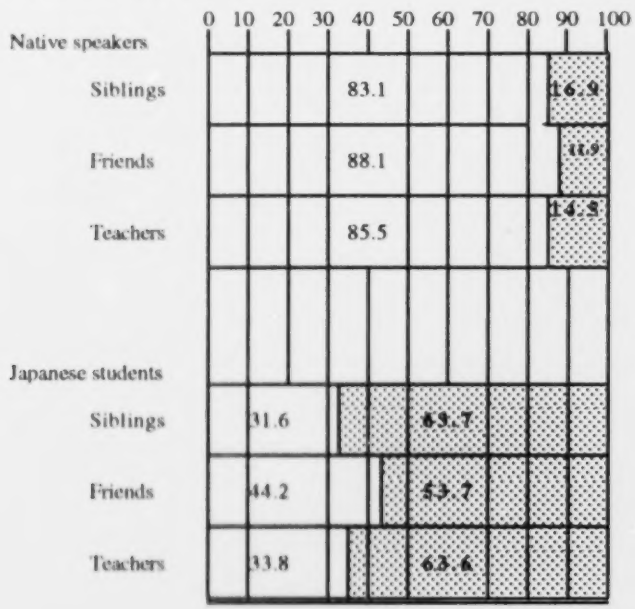
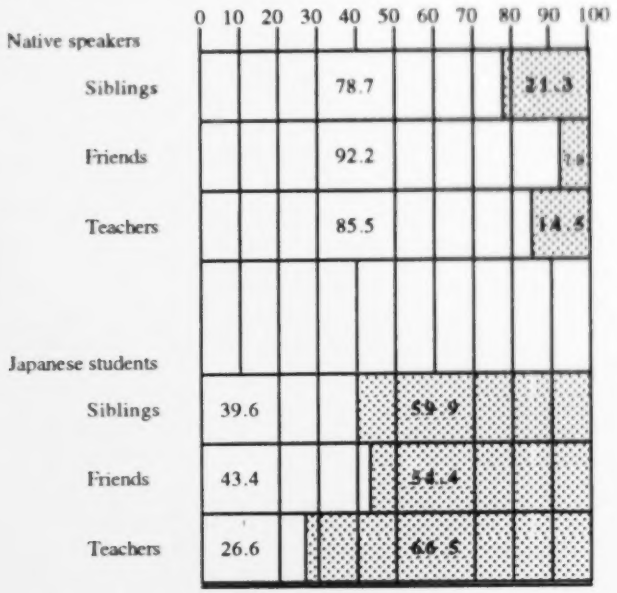


Figure 1 focuses on the social distance between the interactants. We graphed the mean in Table 3. The white space shows the preference for the 'asking for permission,' the darker space for the 'requesting' and the horizontally striped space for the 'want-statement' strategies.

As is clearly demonstrated, the native speakers preferred the 'asking for permission' strategy regardless of the social distance. On the other hand, the distribution pattern for the Japanese students as opposed to the native speakers is very different. As shown in the lower column of the figure, the strategies of the students were divided into two; the students 'requesting' outnumbered those 'asking for permission.' It is interesting to note that there is a quantitatively marked difference between the behavior of the native speakers and that of the Japanese students.

Fig. 2 focuses on the degree of imposition on addressees. As in Fig.1, the native speakers did not change their strategy, showing their preference for the 'asking for permission,' regardless of the degree of imposition. In the case of the Japanese students, when they wanted to borrow an item requiring a high degree of imposition, they used the 'requesting' strategy more (the darker space) and the 'asking for permission' strategy less (the white space). We can see that about 66.5% of the students preferred the 'requesting' strategy. The number of the students using the 'want statement' strategy, though slight, also increased. This probably suggests that many students think the "Would you lend me ...?" structure is very polite. Also,

Figure 1. Social Distance



some students think that the "I would like to borrow ..." structure is preferable in this context.

Individual case

So far we have explained the overall tendency of an interactional style between the native speakers of English and the Japanese students concerning their preference for certain strategies. It is interesting to observe here how individual participants changed their choice of expressions according to the social distance and the degree of imposition.

First, for comparison of the social distance we chose friends (speakers of equal social distance) and teachers (speakers of extreme social distance). The requested item was an umbrella, the medium degree of imposition. When they wanted to borrow an umbrella from their friends and teachers, did the participants use the same expressions or did they change their expressions? If they did, did they stick to the same strategy or did they change their strategy, from the 'asking for permission' to the 'requesting' or vice versa?

Out of the 26 native speakers, 8 used the same expressions with both their friends and teachers: for example, "Could I borrow your umbrella?" 17 changed their choice of expressions, as shown in Table 5. But all of them remained committed to the same strategy. For example, some said to their friends, "Can I borrow your umbrella?" and to their teachers, "Do you think we could borrow your camera?" both in the 'asking for permission' strategy.

In the case of the 64 Japanese students, 18 didn't change their expressions and 5 gave

Table 5. PEOPLE WHO HAVE CHANGED THEIR CHOICE OF EXPRESSIONS
Social Distance: from Friends to Teachers
Degree of Imposition: Medium (Umbrellas) ( ) = raw scores

	Same Strategy	Different Strategy		
No.		P ---> R	R ---> P	S ---> R
N.	100%	0	0	0
17	(17)	(0)	(0)	(0)
J.	49%	32%	12%	2%
37	(19)	(13)	(5)	(1)

N = Native Speaker
J = Japanese Student
P = Asking for Permissions
R = Requesting
S = Want Statement

wrong answers. As shown in the lower column of Table 5, out of the 41 who changed their choice of expressions, 19 remained committed to the same strategy, and 2 gave inconsistent reactions, such as "Would you lend me your umbrella?" to their friends and a less polite form - "Will you lend me your umbrella?" to their teachers. In order to be polite to teachers, the same number of the students (19) changed their strategies, 13 students (32%) changed from the 'asking for permission' to the 'requesting,' 5 changed from the 'requesting' to the 'asking for permission,' and 1 changed from the 'want statement' to the 'requesting.'

Table 6 shows the number of the participants who changed their choice of expressions by

Table 6. PEOPLE WHO HAVE CHANGED THEIR CHOICE OF EXPRESSIONS
Degree of Imposition: Medium (Umbrellas)
Addressees: Teachers ( ) = raw scores

	Same Strategy	Different Strategy					
No.		P ---> R	R ---> P	S ---> R	R ---> S	P ---> S	
N.	65%	18%	18%	0	0	0	
17	(11)	(3)	(3)	(0)	(0)	(0)	
J.	32%	35%	14%	3%	5%	5%	Inconsistent
37	(12)	(13)	(5)	(1)	(2)	(2)	(2)

N = Native Speaker
J = Japanese Student
P = Asking for Permissions
R = Requesting
S = Want Statement

the degree of imposition. As a typical example, we chose teachers as addressees. The requested items were pencils and cameras. This time, 3 native speakers changed their strategies from the 'asking for permission' to the 'requesting,' and 3 vice versa.

Interestingly, in the case of the native speakers who changed from the 'requesting' to the 'asking for permission' strategy, they simply changed the verbs from "Could you lend me ...?" to "Could we borrow ...?" They probably thought that in order to borrow a camera the 'asking for permission' strategy from the speaker's perspective was more appropriate. The responses of those who changed from the 'asking for permission' to the 'requesting' strategy were longer and more complex. They not only changed the verbs, but used other means of mitigation as well. One changed from "May I borrow one?" to "Do you have a camera that you might be able to lend us?"; another, "Can I borrow...?" to "Would you mind lending ...?" and the third, "Could I borrow ...?" to "Do you think you could lend us ...?" Thus, they all softened their requests.

In the case of the Japanese students, 23 out of 37 changed their strategies. More than a third (13) changed from the 'asking for permission' to the 'requesting,' 5 from the 'requesting' to the 'asking for permission,' and 1 from the 'want statement' to the 'requesting.' Though the number was small, there were 4 students who switched from the 'requesting' and the 'asking for permission' to the 'want statement.'

It is interesting to note that there is a marked difference in the quality of expressions between those used by the native speakers and the ones used by the Japanese students. Both groups, when asking teachers to do a favor or when trying to borrow an item of high imposition, naturally raised their politeness level in such a way that they could achieve their goal without being offensively direct. The Japanese students who used the imperative forms with or without 'please' softened their requests by choosing interrogative forms such as "Will you lend me/Would you lend me ...?"

As shown in Tables 5 and 6, about half of the students remained committed to the same strategy while the other half changed their strategies. Regardless of whether they changed their strategies or not, we should note that almost all of the students used one mitigating de-

vice; they changed modal verbs. They changed from 'can' to 'may' and from 'will' to 'would.' It should also be noted here that very few students used the modal 'could,' which contrasted with the choice of the native speakers.

The expressions of the native speakers, on the other hand, were more delicately phrased. They used various mitigating devices. Some changed modal verbs from 'can' to 'may,' and to the past 'could.' Examples of lexical and phrasal mitigating devices ('down-graders' in Blum-Kulka's terms) were used a lot, such as consultative expressions ("Do you think I could borrow one?"/"Do you have one I could borrow...?") and understaters ("Could I borrow one just for today?"), softening the request by adding 'just for today.' Some used a politeness marker 'please' within the interrogative form ("Could I please borrow your umbrella?"). Conditional clauses were also used ("Would it be all right if I borrowed one?" and "Would it be possible to borrow one?") When they wanted to borrow a camera from their teachers, "Would you mind if I borrow one?" and "If it's ok, could we please borrow yours?" and "We were wondering if you might have one we could ...?" were used. When the speakers wanted to reduce the imposition placed on the addressees they did so by promising the return of the umbrella ("Do you think I could borrow one? I'll bring it back ....").

DISCUSSION

So far we have seen a variation in the choices among the available strategies and expressions, in a given context. Specifically, we noticed three major characteristics of the Japanese students' behavior as opposed to the native speakers', concerning the pair-verbs 'borrow' and 'lend.'

1. The majority of the native speakers preferred the 'asking for permission' strategy consistently in most of the contexts, while the Japanese students' preference varied. The 'requesting' outnumbered the 'asking for permission' strategy. Some Japanese students chose the 'want statement,' which no native speaker used when the social relationship was distant and the degree of imposition was high.
2. Both the native speakers and Japanese students varied their choices of expressions depending on the social distance and the degree of imposition, but they did so in different ways. Most of the native speakers did not change their strategies, while half of the Japanese students switched theirs. They changed their strategies from the 'asking for permission' to the 'requesting,' especially when the situation called for polite behavior.
3. The linguistic behavior when trying to be more polite, from equal social distance (friends) to extreme social distance (teachers) or from the low degree of imposition (pencils) to the high degree (cameras), showed a marked difference between the expressions used by the native speakers and those used by the Japanese students. The native speakers adopted less direct expressions within the same 'asking for permission' strategy by using various devices of mitigation.

The range of mitigation devices used by the Japanese students, on the other hand, was

rather limited, and many of their expressions were formulaic; they relied extensively on modals, especially 'Can/May/Will' and 'Would.'

What, then, are some possible reasons for this divergence between the native speakers and the Japanese students? One reason is that the Japanese students have not mastered various politeness strategies described by Brown and Levinson (1978) and Blum-Kulka et al. (1989), which explains in part the relative simplicity of the students' expressions. But the more likely explanation, concerning a language-specific preference pattern for a particular strategy, seems to be in the difference of communication norms between English and Japanese.

When alternatives, the 'asking for permission' strategy or the 'requesting' strategy, are available to speakers, the criterion for choosing either one of them as being appropriate seems to have to do with cultural differences of the language backgrounds. In the English speaking culture, independence of individuals is highly valued, and the appropriate manner is: "Don't impose" and "Give options." (Lakoff, 1973, p. 298) In this context, by using "Can I/Could I...?" the speaker can imply that "You have the power to make a decision; however, I will be able to act on my own if you give me permission." If "Can you/Will you ...?" is used in English, the speaker may sound either too dependent on the addressee or too pushy (imposing). As Blum-Kulka et al. contended, "...avoidance to name the hearer as actor can reduce the form's level of coerciveness." (p. 19)

In the Japanese speaking culture, the choice of the addressee perspective has a different social meaning. One rule of politeness in Japanese is to minimize the value of what the speaker gives to the addressee, whereas when the speaker receives something, he/she maximizes its value and often says so to the addressee. Also, since mutual dependence is the appropriate social manner in the Japanese society, the strategy is to emphasize the fact that the speaker is indebted to the addressee. Naming the addressee as actor (benefactor), therefore, is a mitigating device. This strategy tends to make the addressee feel good. When more than 10% of the students (7) used the 'requesting' strategy, "Will you lend me a camera?" to their teachers, they probably thought this expression was polite when addressing their teachers. It is not surprising then that two-thirds of the students (26) used "Would you lend me ...?"

On the other hand, the 'asking for permission' with the verb 'borrow' in the Japanese culture suggests that the speaker is not sure whether he/she can borrow the item or not, which requires the speaker to ask for permission. Using this strategy to borrow an item when the addressee would surely lend one, therefore, creates a sense of distance between the speaker and the addressee. The expression tends to be interpreted as very polite; sometimes too polite in casual conversation.

PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

The difference between the native speakers' and Japanese students' responses to the questionnaire clearly shows that communication norms in English and Japanese are different with regard to the type of situation we have presented in this study. This difference calls for attention especially when second language learners try to communicate in the target language. While many of the students in our study could write good grammatical sentences, many still needed to develop a target-like pragmatic competence. In other words, they have to be aware of the

English communication norm in each situation and use it appropriately.

In the classroom students learn two distinct functions, 'asking for permission' and 'requesting' along with the scale of politeness for each function, but they learn them separately. As a result, Japanese students may not be able to use these strategies naturally as the native speakers do. The textbook by Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (p. 84) is one example of this approach. In it the authors provide examples of 'requests of a general nature' and 'specific requests for permission,' which we can see in the following:

requests of a general nature:

Will
Would you help me with this math problem?
Can
Could

specific requests for permission:

May
Might I leave the room?
Can
Could

Although the distinction between 'requests' and 'asking for permission' seems clear, it falls short of teaching communicative rules to students. A table of modals 'will, would, can, could, may, might' given in a list does not help the students, either. Therefore, the uses of such modals have to be taught in context, especially in the case of pair-verb situations like 'borrow' and 'lend.'

The results of our study point to some information which will help students develop a target-like competence.

1. Native speakers of English prefer the 'asking for permission' strategy to the 'requesting' strategy when they can choose either to achieve the same goal. This fact suggests that the use of this strategy is perhaps more appropriate in the 'borrow/lend' and other pair-verb situations in English, and that this is different from the predominant strategy in Japanese.
2. Native speakers use "Can/Could/May ... ?", but 'can' and 'could' more frequently than 'may,' especially when they speak to friends.
3. Students at the intermediate level should be taught various devices of mitigation, such as "Do you think that ...?" and so on.

CONCLUSION

In the present study, we tried to illustrate the differences between communication norms in English and Japanese in a unique situation where the speech acts of 'asking for permission' and 'requesting' merge, focusing on the pair-verbs: 'borrow' and 'lend.' We have seen a marked

divergence between the native speakers and the Japanese students in their preferences for respective strategies. While our results cannot be readily extended to other verbs such as 'bring' and 'take,' we hope that what we have found will prove helpful in better understanding the communication norms of English and Japanese.

Finally, we would like to pose two questions for future studies.

1. Is it the case that the strategies and expressions used by Japanese students become more like those used by native speakers as their proficiency in English increases?
2. Can our results be attributed to 'universal,' a common aspect of second language acquisition, or to 'language-specific,' a transfer from Japanese to English?

To answer the first question, longitudinal studies will be necessary. To answer the second question, we need to study learners from a variety of native language backgrounds.

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